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By- Gordon, Edmund W., Ed.
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A bulletin consists of two articles on the language development of disadvantaged children. The opposing positions of language teachers on the "correct" approach to teaching standard English are outlined in one of the articles. On one side are those who favor creativity and freedom of expression while on the other side are the "purists" who are committed to the viewpoint of correctness of language. Suggested is a dual curricular approach in which the two kinds of instruction are presented separately. The second article discusses a survey of the language situation in Head Start classes. The survey points up the need for "greater sophistication and flexibility in the conception and identification of verbal deficiencies," an orientation which would enable diagnosis of an individual child's language deficits. (NH)

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SUPPLEMENT TO THE

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FROM THE INFORMATION RETRIEVAL CENTER ON THE DISADVANTAGED

PROJECT BEACON
FERKAUF GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF EDUCATION
YESHIVA UNIVERSITY
55 Fifth Avenue
New York, N. Y. 10003

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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IRCD Bulletin Supplements

Under a small contract with the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Information Retrieval Center on the Disadvantaged has agreed to assemble and disseminate resource and research information concerning early childhood development and education, particularly as it relates to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is not anticipated that the Information Center on the Disadvantaged will continue to provide these services after the establishment of a separate clearinghouse specifically concerned with pre-school education.

To accommodate this temporary charge, several special supplementary issues of the IRCD Bulletin will be published. Each will focus on a problem of concern to educators of disadvantaged children at the pre-school level. Language development has been taken as the focus of the current issue, since so many people working in this field view this aspect of development to be crucial for subsequent academic and social progress. We are indebted to Dr. Beryl Bailey, Assistant Professor of Linguistics, Yeshiva University, and Miss Vivian Horner, Instructor, University of Rochester, for the two thoughtful articles.

A Crucial Problem In Language Intervention As It Relates to the Disadvantaged

Within the ranks of the language teachers, the struggle, long joined, continues unabated between the forces of the "creativists" on the one hand, and those of the "correctionists" on the other. The recent interest in the language development of the disadvantaged has given new impetus to the struggle, which has now broadened to include not only the how implied above, but also when and where intervention should take place.

Those who argue for creativity and for freedom of expression are deeply concerned lest children whom they find largely non-verbal should be suppressed in their efforts to communicate with adults in particular, and consequently wind up having no language at all. Language, they argue, is a tool which is sharpened by constant use, and unless the child is encouraged to use his language freely, he will never become truly verbal.

The purists, on the other hand, are committed to the doctrine of correctness in speech, and argue for early training in proper usage, with its emphasis on correct grammar, correct pronunciation, and the right accent. This group contends that appropriate language, like other appropriate social behavior, is the key which will open doors to upward social mobility. Therefore, the sensible thing to do is to drill the child in the use of the correct forms. Some go so far as to contend that every class should be an English class, and that all teachers should stand constant guard over the language of the children. The evidence points, however, to the fact that this approach is rarely as successful as its protagonists think it should be.

One thing seems clear. As we examine the language of the disadvantaged, we find more and more that it deviates structurally and formally from that of the larger culture, and that we cannot depend on chance or piecemeal correction of the

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Misconceptions Concerning Language in the Disadvantaged

In a recent survey of the language situation in Head Start programs[1], linguist Donald G. Reiff brings under close scrutiny several widely held misconceptions about linguistic phenomena. In an attempt to clarify persistent confusion about language demonstrated in both teaching and research, he discusses a number of attitudes and practices which have been rather unproductive in determining the nature and extent of language problems in disadvantaged children and in suggesting feasible solutions.

Most sweeping in its effects, perhaps, is the almost universal assumption that a verbal deficiency implies some sort of abnormality. What is accepted as the "norm" is the language patterns of the white, middle-class child of educated parents, though such a child may well be in the minority. This view is reified by research, which must rely upon measuring instruments and analytic techniques designed for and standardized on middle-class populations. Reiff indicates one of the dangers:

> The fact that intelligence quotients and measures of mental age depend highly upon verbal information . . .does not deter those who attribute poor verbal performance to low intelligence, less than appropriate mental age figures, or deficient cognitive development.

The simple fact is that the kinds of "defects" identified reflect little more than the structure of the instruments used to identify them. Reiff urges that caution be exercised in assessment:

[1] See (Recommended reading) reference 6

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dialect forms to achieve our goal. New patterns have to be taught; the copula with its diverse present tense forms (am, is, are), the sibilant ending on possessive nouns, the singular-plural distinction in the present forms of verbs, to name a few of the features of the standard which do not occur in the child's dialect.

Although this article is restricted to the classroom situation, it must be remembered that a good deal more language learning takes place outside the classroom than within it, and this may in large measure be responsible for the traditional emphasis in schools on correctness, which was not likely to be taught anywhere else.

It is equally obvious, however, that unbridled freedom of expression may leave the child insensitive to the very features of the language which may militate against his social and economic progress. The understanding middle-class mother does not let her child prattle wildly on, but intervenes at appropriate moments, providing the vocabulary item which the child doesn't know, articulating more clearly an ill-perceived phrase, or correcting a grammatical pattern. The disadvantaged child, with far less opportunity for interaction with adults, is less likely to receive the benefits of such correction in these formative years, and even if he does, the forms he learns will surely be those of the language of the sub-culture, rather than those of the school.

The classroom teacher is therefore faced with a dilemma which must be resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned. More likely than not, she will have been brought up in one or the other school of thought, and will see her role either as that of nurturing uninhibited, well-adjusted personalities, capable of conceptualizing their universe and of utilizing language to adequately communicate such conceptualizations, or as that of shaping the child's linguistic performance so that the rules of the standard language are always observed.

This is, however, not an "either-or" situation. Both goals must be achieved within the framework of our school structure and, since it would appear that the approaches are mutually exclusive, then some provision must be made in the curriculum for both types of activity. While there is a consensus that the opportunities for language development must be provided throughout the school life (beginning with the pre-school years), that the environment must be enriched to provide exposure to good literature and good language models, and that the children must be stimulated and encouraged to imitate the models and to use the new vocabulary items provided by their new experiences, not nearly so much agreement attaches to the amount of attention to be given to the so-called incorrect usage.

I would like to suggest here that there is room for both approaches throughout the curriculum, and, what is more, that the sooner the intervention takes place, the better. I would suggest, too, that the two be kept separate, that is, that a short period of the school day be reserved for drills in correct usage, in which utterances are initiated not by the children, but by the teacher, who will have chosen the patterns to be drilled from the children's experience. This means that the teacher must be equipped with the linguistic tools necessary to diagnose the areas of greatest deviation in the children's language, and must be prepared, with the use of appropriate props and reinforcement, to structure situations in which the forms to be learned will be drilled in rote fashion. For the pre-school child the drills can be built into a play situation; as they grow older, the props will be gradually removed, and the drills as well as the rules underlying them will become the sole content of the language lesson period.

The argument for the separation of these types of activity is based on the fact that there is no necessary link between verbalness or the ability to communicate one's conceptualizations and proficiency in the use of the forms or structures of a given language. We have yet to prove that, if the language of the school were that of the sub-culture, there would be any great difficulty in getting children to express their concepts succinctly and appropriately. But given, as we have in our disadvantaged populations, 1) a language which has not been developed or expanded to articulate high-level intellectual concepts, and 2) a society in which all such tasks are performed within the framework of the standard language only, then there seems to be no alternative than to equip the disadvantaged child with 1) the forms and structures of the standard and 2) the opportunities for developing the ability to use these forms and structures for higher intellectual tasks.

The time has come for us to renounce the useless polemics as to which course should be followed. We simply cannot leave the dialect of the disadvantaged alone. To rely solely on environmental enrichment to supply their linguistic deficiencies is being unduly optimistic. Until schools are so structured that the disadvantaged child can have one-to-one interaction with a suitable adult model, or until the disadvantaged child can be placed in integrated situations in which peer-group pressure will serve to modify his language, we must provide, throughout the curriculum, (and here even the Head Start programs are included) some opportunity for drills in those forms or patterns of the standard which are foreign to the child's dialect, to supplement the enrichment phase of his training. The question, then, is not one of which approach, but one of degree,—how much of each ingredient, is optimally beneficial at each stage, and it is to this task that our research must now be directed.

B. L. Bailey

> [Our first need is for] honesty in the recognition of assumptions which lead to the construction of hypothetical notions of 'normalcy' and 'deficit.' Difference is the term we need; the negative aspects of difference become apparent only on examination of the implications of difference.

A similar point is made with regard to a widespread failure to distinguish between a speech defect (an organically determined, pathological problem requiring therapy) and a language deficit (a behaviorally determined problem, remediable by teaching). This confusion frequently leads to a referral of all "language problems" for speech therapy. Thus overloaded speech therapists find themselves with clientele ranging from the child whose cleft palate interferes with the acquisition of intelligible speech to the child who does not talk at all to the child whose "problem" is that he did not score well on the PPVT. Clearly it is a responsibility in which the teacher should share, but this is evident only if a basic distinction is made.

Similarly, there seems to be a general confusion between dialect-determined pronunciation patterns and articulatory defects:

> Slowness in acquiring 'the sounds of the language' appears to be a commonly observed phenomenon in the culturally deprived, though one searches in vain for a description of what speech sounds these children are expected to acquire, and whether or not the sounds they do not acquire are part of the dialect they are acquiring.

The Negro child's "Come wif' me" is labelled "substitution" or "distortion" despite the fact that the child demonstrates a phonological pattern consistent with that of his own speech

community. This labelling probably derives from the use of articulatory tests, which are constructed on the basis of a hypothetical norm, never described, and which are standardized on a different population. Yet scores are readily translated into descriptions of "articulatory immaturity" and "developmental lag". Such terms are meaningless in the absence of an existent and carefully specified norm for these children.

Another set of misconceptions stems from a kind of naïveté which is best described as linguistic chauvinism. Perhaps the best known example of this is the linguists' Miss Fidditch, a fictional English teacher, who spends all her class time issuing edicts against the use of ain't and double negatives. Her archaic conception of grammar as "correctness" rather than as a description of the way people use language has set for her the primary teaching goal of eliminating "dialect"; nothing must remain but the "pure, intrinsically superior standard language". For the sophisticated student of language, "dialect" is recognized as the way of referring to the collective speech patterns of one subcommunity as opposed to those of any other sub-community. Everyone speaks a dialect (or several) and it is only an accident of history that one ("standard") currently occupies a position of prestige with respect to the others. Thus, to the linguist, Miss Fidditch is an amusing figure. The humor is lost, however, in observing that her attitudes are still very much with us. So much so, in fact, that the National Council of Teachers of English task force on language programs for the disadvantaged[2] found it necessary to caution against concern with nonstandard English dialect at the preschool level except to the extent that it interferes with learning.

A danger inherent in continous "correction" of speech is that effort is wasted on form at a time when it is far more important to help the child become proficient in the use of language. Furthermore, "correction" constitutes punishment for the child's attempt to communicate verbally, and may serve to inhibit further attempts to speak in the classroom.

Reiff points up another manifestation of this linguistic chauvinism in attitudes toward children who are native speakers of foreign languages, and whose English is either nonexistent, not fully developed, or "accented". The middle-class community strongly supports the notion of English as "superior", and any one who does not speak it, or who speaks it with a foreign accent, is considered by definition to be part of the "disadvantaged" population. Arthur Rubel[3] discusses some of the effects of such attitudes in the Southwest:

> The importance imputed to the control of English language skills may be inferred from a wide-spread pattern in which school administrations prohibit young scholastics from speaking Spanish on or near the school grounds. . . it is difficult indeed to overemphasize the practical and symbolic importance which administrators and teachers attach to the acquiring of English and the loss of Spanish by young school children. . .I can think of no other punitive program which has had so contrary an outcome as the one just described. . .not only is Spanish heard whenever a supervisory teacher is not in the immediate vicinity, but the very prohibition itself has increased the importance which spoken Spanish has for the Mexican-American and the Southwest. The ban is considered one more instance of the denigration of the entire traditional way of life of Spanish-speaking Americans by the dominant Anglo-American group.

Such inflexible policies, dictated by the dominant social ideology, are translated into practices which fail entirely to consider level of performance in the native language, and lead to a generalization of "verbal inadequacy". The verbal demands on the non-English-speaking child are enormous in this light; no less enormous is the teaching task. This hard-headed position forces once more a concern with form at a time when function is the critical issue. Reiff concludes:

> The 'absolute' verbal skills of the individual, in his native language first (or his native dialect) and in English second, is necessary to gain a full picture. . .it may well be that before a child can become verbal in English to a sufficient degree to ensure his success or at least remove any limiting factors for his future education, he must become verbal in his native language or dialect.

What seems clearly indicated by Reiff's discussion is a need for greater sophistication and flexibility in the conception and identification of verbal deficiencies, if we hope to design effective techniques for their remediation. We need to shift from our present global attack on "the language problem" to a sharply focussed attack on "language problems" specified by examining the individual child's entering repertoires in the light of all the linguistic and behavioral information currently available. Such a change in orientation should lead to more meaningful research and to instructional programs which will establish the kinds of verbal repertoires which enable the child to control his environment more effectively.

V. Horner

[2]See reference 4
[3]See reference 7

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4. National Council of Teachers of English. Language programs for the disadvantaged: NCTE task force report on teaching English to the disadvantaged. Champaign, Ill., NCTE, 1965.

5. ---------- Social dialects and language learning. Champaign, Ill., NCTE, 1964.

6. Reiff, Donald G., and Julià, Pere. The language situation in Project Head Start Centers, 1965. Final report, Office of Economic Opportunity, Office of Research and Evaluation, Project Head Start, Contract OEO-932. Washington, D. C., 1966.

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9. ---------- Urban Negro speech: sociolinguistic factors affecting English teaching. Washington, D.C., Center for Applied Linguistics, 1965.

SERVICES AVAILABLE THROUGH IRCD

1. The entire collection of materials on the education of socially-disadvantaged children and youth -- books, reports, abstracts of articles, newspaper clippings, bibliography files, and other materials -- is available for use at the Center, Monday through Friday, 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

2. A periodic statement of developments in the field of compensatory education, including a comprehensive bibliography, is provided upon request.

3. Special bibliographies on specific topics are compiled and provided upon request.

4. Copies of available abstracts relating to specific topics are provided upon request.

5. Other requests for information are fulfilled insofar as resources permit, especially requests which define specifically the types of information sought.

6. Each issue of the IRCD BULLETIN includes, among other things, a selected bibliography on some aspect of the field. (The BULLETIN is published five times during the year.)

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Edmund W. Gordon - Editor
Ferkauf Graduate School of Education
Yeshiva University
55 Fifth Avenue New York, N.Y. 10003

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